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Officers seeing more run ins with people suffering from mental illness

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LEE COUNTY, AL - "Sheriffs in Alabama ... are in a unique situation, because we see first hand these individuals that are not being able to have any other resources end up in our county jails," Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones said.

Statistics show 1 in five people will be affected by a mental disorder.

Lee County officers see it and their run in with those suffering from mental illness is becoming more common.

"We're finding more, and more that we're seeing individuals with personality disorders ... with mental issues, if you will ... that we are dealing with," Sheriff Jones said.

NAMI Alabama is an organization that educates, advocates and supports people affected by mental illness.

They're hoping to expand a program, but just needs the funds to do it. It's training for officers called crisis intervention team training.

"Our objective with this is certainly to help the officers stabilize a crisis situation to get a ... individual with mental illness to the appropriate resource for appropriate care," NAMI Alabama Executive Director Wanda Laird said.

Laird said the specialized training is one-on-one and decreases the number of injuries to officers, and force overall.

"The benefits for the mental health include increased opportunity for earlier intervention by them seeking treatment instead of them being incarcerated," Laird said

As for Sheriff Jones, he said his deputies are trained to deal with situations of mental illness, but when it comes to combating the issue statewide, he said the problem is the lack of funding and facilities.

On September 24, 2016 NAMI Alabama will have a statewide walk to help raise money for programs like crisis intervention team training. The walk will happen in Montgomery at the Wynton Blount Cultural Park. For more information check out the following link: <http://www.namiwalks.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=donorDrive.event&eventID=567>

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